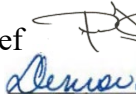




TO: Mayor and Council Members

FROM: Joseph Chacon, Austin Police Department Chief
Denise Lucas, Development Services Director 

DATE: December 27, 2021

SUBJECT: Safer 6th Street Initiative (Resolution No. 20210729-175)

The purpose of this memo is to provide a response on action items related to the Safer 6th Street resolution.

Background

Council Resolution No. [20210729-175](#) established City Council support for implementing a more comprehensive strategy toward 6th Street that maximizes its assets, embraces new opportunities, and ensures a safer environment for all, and established that the strategy needs to be multi-faceted and build on previous stakeholder processes and consultant reports. The resolution outlined actions to be taken, and for staff to report to Council on the results. Below is the response on each action item.

Response to Action Items

- **Action #1:** Create an interdepartmental team led by the Entertainment Services Group and with representation from – at a minimum – the Austin Police Department, Austin Transportation Department, Austin Energy, Austin Fire Department, Austin/Travis County Emergency Medical Services, Austin Code, and the Historic Preservation Office.

Response: The interdepartmental team was created, held their kick-off meeting on August 16, 2021, and continued to meet to carry out the action items in the resolution.

- **Action #2:** Use temporary lighting and upgrade existing lighting if necessary to provide dramatically brighter spaces along the 6th Street corridor.

Response: The interdepartmental team identified locations that need additional lighting as well as priority areas for lighting. For context, 6th Street has decorative light poles, and the north-south side streets and alleys have traditional street light poles. The decorative poles on 6th Street had previously been upgraded to LED and optimized. The locations identified by the team for additional lighting are the north-south side streets and alleys. Austin Energy crews went through the 6th Street District to assess and perform maintenance on the existing traditional street lighting poles. Within the district crews replaced all of the old style high pressure sodium fixtures with LED. In all, AE replaced 64 heads of which approximately 10% were not working.

Next Steps:

- Conduct a lighting study to assess if there are gaps in the street light network in the district. Requests for new street light poles to fill any identified gaps will require funding and need to be added to Austin Energy's priority list for installs.
- Street light poles in the alleys are limited. There is very little room in the alleys for poles, existing poles typically get removed for new construction that extends to the lot line, and Austin Energy is not installing new poles in the alleys. The team is going to begin contacting property owners to encourage the installation of lighting from their buildings facing the alley and recommends that this practice of encouraging property owners to light the alleys from their buildings continue into the future.
- The team believes that the best solution for lighting of high-volume pedestrian areas is lighting specifically designed for pedestrians rather than the street light network. The team recommends that any future redesign or rebuild of the street or streetscape include dedicated pedestrian lighting solutions.
- **Action #3:** Explore and pilot options such as café seating, water barriers, and other “pop up” efforts for temporarily dedicating wider walkways for patrons to move between establishments and eliminating the space where people gather during the weekend closures by using the street for other purposes

Response: The interdepartmental team recommends the creation of pilot programs that allow for the installation of seating, dining, and small-scale activations in the right of way on the 200, 500, 600 & 700 blocks of 6th Street. The goal of the programs is to add more diverse uses, bring a wider demographic to the 6th Street District and begin to help diversify and change the character of the street.

Pilot Program 1: Activations during 6th Street closure on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

- Allow business to apply to the City to utilize a designated space on the sidewalk, parking lane and a portion of the travel lane on the 200 & 500 blocks of 6th Street for seating, dining and other small-scale activations (music, performance, art installation etc.).
 - A group of businesses or an association could also apply to curate an activation or create a combined seating area.
- Furnishings would have to be moved into and out of the space at designated times each weekend night during the road closure.
- Simple and minimal visual boundary marker envisioned to designate space.
- Quick and easy application process is envisioned.

Next Steps:

- Staff will finalize program criteria, requirements, and application process and implement the program.

Pilot Program 2: Activations not confined to 6th Street closure on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights.

- Allow business to utilize sidewalk and parking lane space for seating, dining and activations on the 200, 500, 600 & 700 blocks of 6th Street and Sabine Street by creating a pilot program customized for the 6th Street District
 - A program similar to the existing Shop the Block pilot, but customized for 6th Street is envisioned.
 - An individual business could apply, or a group of businesses or an association could also apply to create a combined seating area or curate an activation.

Next Steps:

- Determine customizations needed for the 6th Street District including allowable hours, uses and applicants, and seek council authorization to create a new pilot program.
- **Action #4:** Determine the extent to which earlier assertions about underage presence on 6th Street and underage drinking remain true today.

Response: APD has confirmed that the earlier assertions about underage presence in 6th Street and underage drinking remains true today.
 - **Action #5:** Briefly list which recommendations noted in the July 17, 2015, staff memo “Response to Resolution No. 20140925-081 – Downtown Entertainment Districts” and from the two consultant reports have been implemented.

Response: A brief list of recommendations that have been implemented was sent to Mayor and Council in a previous [update](#).
 - **Action #6:** Engage with peer cities to identify best practices in entertainment district planning and management and provide additional recommendations to Council based on that research.

Response: The interdepartmental team has engaged with peer cities including Seattle, San Francisco, New York, Orlando, Las Vegas, Arlington, VA and Sydney, Australia.
 - **Action #7:** Explore the feasibility of creating a dedicated EMS presence during weekend nights with personnel using specialized vehicles for rapid response, treatment, and extrication.

Response: Planning is already underway by APD, AFD and EMS to create a dedicated presence and staging area on 6th Street. This strategy will allow EMS and Fire medics, accompanied by APD officers to enter areas that are not completely secured to get to, treat and extricate patients faster.
 - **Action #8:** Suggest a process and program for entertainment licenses that includes safety training for staff and increased coordination and communication with public safety officers.

Response:

 - The interdepartmental team suggests that an annual Entertainment Permit be required for Places of Assembly in the 6th Street district with operating hours after 12am. The permit should include a required safety plan and once approved must be adhered to by the permitted establishment. The safety plan will include details on the number of security personnel and training requirements, description of door policies, and establishment procedures (including but not limited to): preventing serving minors and overserving; handling incidents and

emergencies; and addressing crowd control and preventing overcrowding. The team suggest that the City coordinate regular meetings with permit holders to increase coordination and communication with City departments, APD and each other, and that this forum be utilized for the City to provide training on a variety of topics such as fake ID detection, de-escalation techniques, active shooter training, and fire safety and prevention. The team suggests that permitted establishments should not require a separate operating permit from the Fire Department for fire prevention, or the Development Services Department for the use of sound equipment, and instead that these inspections, reviews and approvals take place as part of the issuance of the annual Entertainment Permit. The team suggests that the existing process and work flow for the Outdoor Music Venue permit be utilized for the new Entertainment Permit and that the Entertainment Services Group coordinate the process and serve as a liaison to permit holders.

- The team envisions utilizing the increased coordination, communication and relationships built through the entertainment permit as the foundation for creating a voluntary accreditation program in the future that recognizes responsible operators. With an approach based on building relationships and trust, and a focus on prevention, guidance, training, and support, the goals of the program would be to improve safety, reduce alcohol-related violence and harm, diversify activities, enhance peer to peer self-regulation, and improve establishment operating standards.
- **Action #9:** Coordinate with the Texas Alcohol and Beverage Commission (TABC) on additional strategies for curbing underage drinking and potentially limiting the presence of underage Austinites on 6th Street during weekend evenings.

Response: TABC conducted an operation on September 2, 2021 to target underage drinkers and fake IDs. TABC and APD will be jointly conducting operations and initiatives as they have done in the past.

- **Action #10:** Initiate development of a nightlife management plan

Response: The creation of an interdepartmental team, a comprehensive approach to nightlife and entertainment district management, and work on strategies to create a district that is vibrant, well planned, diverse and safe has already laid a solid foundation for the development of a nightlife management plan for 6th Street. A sustained effort with departments and stakeholders working collaboratively on developing, refining and implementing this plan over the medium and long-term can help us achieve our goals for 6th Street and contribute to safety in a sustainable way. We are well underway with initiating the plan and several key goals and aspirations have emerged including:

- **Improving Public Space Design:** bring more organization to the space at night, provide wider and dedicated pedestrian pathways and infrastructure, improved pedestrian lighting, and better accessibility for public safety.
- **Creating Better Partnerships with Bars:** utilize written safety plans, training for door staff, increased communication with APD, standards of behavior for staff and patrons, and peer to peer communication and codes of conduct.

- Encouraging More Diverse Uses: include more daytime and early evening uses, more activities beyond just drinking, including live music, DJ, theatrical and comedy performance, sports, games, restaurants, and retail; and cultivate a district where visitors and all of the Austin community feel safe, comfortable and welcome, and are represented.
- **Action #11:** Review plan for responding to mass casualties.
 - Response:** Planning is already underway by APD, AFD and EMS to create a dedicated presence and staging area on 6th Street. This strategy will allow EMS and Fire medics, accompanied by APD officers to enter areas that are not completely secured to get to, treat and extricate patients faster.
- **Action #12:** Analyze 6th Street weekend closures, and if the team believes changes would be beneficial, develop a list of measures that would need to be met for 6th Street to be re-opened and propose a corresponding timeline.
 - Response:** With the current very high volume of pedestrians present, especially during peak late-night hours of 11:30pm-2:30am, and narrow sidewalks, the team does not believe re-opening 6th Street would be feasible. The team believes that more diverse uses in the 6th Street district with patrons visiting establishments during the daytime, evening, night and late-night hours could lead to 6th Street being visited by both more people and a more diverse demographic, but with those visits being more spread out instead of concentrated only during late-night hours. In addition, this could naturally lead to a staggered exit throughout the evening and reduce the very high volume of patrons exiting establishments all at the same time at 2:00am. If this type of change in uses and pattern of visits were realized, and if there were wider sidewalks installed on 6th Street in the future, the team believes this topic could be re-examined to see if the conditions make re-opening the street more feasible. While it is outside the direct scope of this item, we want to recognize that a redesign and rebuild of 6th Street could both add wider sidewalks (and other pedestrian infrastructure) and catalyze investment and changes in use in the adjacent historic buildings and thereby contribute to a more diverse mix of uses in the district.
- **Action #13:** Engage with property owners and impacted stakeholders to discuss land use regulations along 6th Street to determine whether changes might foster more diverse uses along this historic corridor.
 - Response:** The interdepartmental team believes that a new historic survey of the 6th Street National Historic District with recommendations on which properties are contributing to the district and which properties are non-contributing, as well as potentially including guidance on how non-contributing properties could be redeveloped while maintaining the cohesiveness and integrity of the historic district, would provide more documented information and predictably to property owners, and could encourage investment in properties and lead to more diverse uses in the district. As was mentioned for the previous item, we want to recognize that a redesign and rebuild of 6th Street with the addition of pedestrian infrastructure could catalyze investment and changes in use in the adjacent buildings and thereby contribute to a more diverse mix of uses. Finally, impacted stakeholders suggested that a grant, loan or incentive program for remodeling historic buildings to include kitchens could lead to more investment and more diverse uses in those buildings.

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Brian Block, Entertainment Services Manager, at 512-974-7966 or Brian.Block@austintexas.gov.

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